United Nations A/C.4/54/SR.24

General Assembly
Fifty-fourth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
11 April 2000
English
Original: Spanish

Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

Summary record of the 24th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 18 November 1999, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Zackheos ..... (Cyprus)

Contents

Agenda item 91: Questions relating to information (*continued*)

Completion of the Committee's work

This record is subject to correction. Corrections should be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned *within one week of the date of publication* to the Chief of the Official Records Editing Section, room DC2-750, 2 United Nations Plaza, and incorporated in a copy of the record.

Corrections will be issued after the end of the session, in a separate corrigendum for each Committee.

00-29365 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 91: Questions relating to information (*continued*) (A/54/21 and Add.1, A/54/415)

1. **Mr. Troyjo** (Brazil) said that his delegation endorsed the statement by the representative of Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group and by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

2. Brazil was following closely the process of integration of the United Nations information centres with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and agreed with the General Assembly that the issue should be approached on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the views of the host country and the autonomy necessary for information centres to carry out their functions. As far as the Centre in Rio de Janeiro was concerned, Brazil welcomed the appointment by the Secretary-General of Mr. Carlos dos Santos.

3. His delegation attached great importance to the use of traditional means of communication to spread the message of the United Nations. Radio broadcasts were particularly useful, since they could reach the most remote areas of the globe and were highly cost-effective. Brazil welcomed with particular satisfaction the signing of an agreement between the Brazilian Public Radio Network (Radiobrás) and United Nations Radio, which, through a receiving network which reached nearly 2,000 radio stations nationwide, would broadcast information in Portuguese to a great number of listeners in Brazil. Not only did Brazil benefit from the wealth of information available in Portuguese, but all the Portuguese-speaking countries of Africa as well, and through an agreement with Portuguese distributors, it would also reach many countries of Europe and East Timor.

4. New information technologies must also be used in the task of spreading the message of the United Nations, and the Internet was an extraordinary tool for that purpose. His delegation congratulated the Department of Public Information on the development of the United Nations web site, its rich and comprehensive content and easy access. The impressive number of daily visits to the site showed the keen public interest in the work of the United Nations. The links to pages devoted to relations between the United Nations, civil society and the business sector, areas to which the United Nations must pay special attention in the twenty-first century, were also commendable.

5. As for the content of the web site, it would be appropriate to use the site to make information available about treaties and other international agreements and to offer search mechanisms to streamline the work of missions of Member States and of academic researchers. In order to build a more democratic and transparent Organization, the availability of resolutions and statements on the web site must be increased and access must be user-friendly.

6. In order to improve the data flow originating at the United Nations, it was important to bear in mind that, in addition to the organizational and technological aspects, the format of the information and the strategy for its channelling and distribution must be considered. His delegation invited the Committee on Information to examine over the next few years the very substance of information, especially at a time when the public image and credibility of the United Nations must be preserved. It was time to work on ways of providing widespread information which supported the concept that the world was a better place where the United Nations was active and strong.

7. **Mr. Mwandembwa** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that his delegation supported the position of the Group of 77 and China and commended the efforts of the Department of Public Information in the field of information.

8. As a developing country, Tanzania believed that the United Nations must take a leading role in helping developing countries in the field of information. The world was changing rapidly, and modern communications technology was transcending the barriers of time and space. With globalization, the world was becoming one big global community. Therefore, it was absurd that in one part of the world the most advanced telecommunications technology was being used while the rest of the world still used outmoded technology. The gulf between the developed and developing world in information technology must be bridged if both parties were to achieve progress and development. His delegation believed that the United Nations could play an important role in that regard.

9. Globalization and the movement towards an information economy heavily dependent on knowledge-based products threatened the already tenuous position of developing countries in the global

economy. Only through modern information and communications technology could those countries accelerate their economic and social development.

10. The need for advanced information technology should not, however, preclude the maintenance of such traditional media as radio and television, as most developing countries still used them, particularly radio. It was heartening to note that both the report of the Committee on Information on its twenty-first session and the report of the Secretary-General insisted that the use of traditional media should be maintained and expanded. His delegation remained optimistic that the pilot projects planned in that area would be executed where they were most needed, namely, in the developing countries.

11. Regarding the process of integration of United Nations information centres with field offices of UNDP, his delegation favoured the option of selective integration, as conditions varied widely from country to country. In Tanzania, for example, the United Nations Information Centre operated under the direction of the UNDP Resident Representative without formal integration. In some cases, the process of integration had not been productive and the services provided by some integrated centres had fallen drastically, raising serious questions about the validity of the policy. The process of integration without examining the prevailing material conditions in each country could reduce the effectiveness of the centres. Full consultation with the host Government on integration was preferable. While integration could strengthen the unified image of the United Nations in the field and achieve economies of scale, resource allocation remained the main obstacle. With proper funding and staffing, most of the problems of those offices would be solved and they would function efficiently.

12. **Mr. Tae-young Moon** (Republic of Korea) said that, in response to the unprecedented influence of the free flow of information on the lives of people around the world, as a result of the accelerated pace of advances in information and communications technologies, the United Nations should enhance public interest and understanding of its many activities. Many people were unclear about what the United Nations did and how it affected their lives. Public awareness was highly important to the success of United Nations activities, and his delegation thus welcomed the Secretary-General's initiatives in that area.

13. Despite considerable financial and personnel constraints, the Department of Public Information had achieved many tangible results in its efforts to improve the United Nations web site, develop more effective news-gathering and delivery systems and strengthen communication channels at the country and regional levels. The United Nations News Service, launched in September and built around the newly-established United Nations News Centre, allowed journalists all over the world to access developing stories from the United Nations as they unfolded. The United Nations homepage facilitated the work of the missions of Member States and thus made it more efficient. As the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions had pointed out in its first report for the biennium 2000-2001, the United Nations web site should become a major instrument in the dissemination of information in the United Nations system.

14. With regard to the equal treatment of all six official languages on the United Nations web site, his delegation welcomed the revised text of draft resolution B (A/54/21/Add.1), which requested the Secretary-General to develop and enhance the United Nations web sites in all the official languages of the Organization, having in mind the goal of achieving modular parity between official languages in a cost-effective manner, and with a focus on textual content.

15. Yet there were other impediments to visiting the United Nations web site. Capacity to access electronic information varied considerably from country to country, and the international community should spare no effort to narrow the technology gap between developed and developing countries. Concurrently, the Department of Public Information must continue its outreach activities through the traditional media; such as print, radio and television, all of which were indispensable for reaching vast segments of the international audience.

16. As for the development of United Nations radio broadcasting capacity, the Department's initiative to explore ways to launch a pilot project in collaboration with Member States and their relevant institutions required their active participation. His delegation hoped that the project would bear fruit in the coming year. The United Nations should also make full use of the occasion of the Millennium Assembly to enliven its activities. The international media focus on the United Nations would provide a unique opportunity to raise popular support for the United Nations and its vital role

in world affairs. His Government was committed to cooperating in the public information efforts of the United Nations and in the work of the Committee on Information.

17. **Ms. Rusu** (Romania) said that her Government supported the statement made by the representative of the Netherlands on behalf of the Group of Western European and Other States. Romania attached great importance to United Nations activities in the information field, because of their role in gaining the interest and support of Governments and civil society throughout the world for the promotion of the objectives of peace, development and human rights as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

18. In the current "information age", where technological advances transcended the barriers of time, space and borders between countries, the impact of all kinds of information on the maintenance and promotion of progress and development of humanity was immeasurable. Therefore, the communications media must be consolidated and further developed both in quality and variety, in order to ensure a wider dissemination of information among all countries and the elimination of imbalances.

19. Her delegation welcomed the proposals made by the Secretary-General on programmes and policies in the areas of information and communications in order to ensure that the message of the United Nations was transmitted more forcefully and that events and actions taken were more accurately reported. It also welcomed the efforts to reorient the work of the Department of Public Information as outlined in the report of the Secretary-General (A/54/415). At the same time, her delegation believed that a consolidation of the Department was necessary in order to respond better to the expectations of Member States and their people.

20. Romania actively encouraged the work of the United Nations information centres, as well as the partnership with governments, mass media, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations and the business community. The United Nations Information Centre in Bucharest was one of the first centres of that kind established by the United Nations, and it attracted a large and diverse audience. Her Government welcomed the creation of new information centres in various regions of the world, especially in developing countries and countries with economies in transition, but it was convinced that the allocation of resources for the establishment of new centres should take into consideration the needs of existing ones. In the light of the experience gained by the Bucharest Information Centre over so many years, it might be a good time to re-examine its conditions of operation.

21. Her delegation strongly supported the functional autonomy of all the information centres. The process of full consultation with the host Governments would definitely help to promote a better, more accurate, more transparent and consistent image of the United Nations. In that regard, her delegation was looking forward to studying the draft guidelines by the Department of Public Information and UNDP indicating the operational framework for the integrated centres. It also supported the draft resolutions submitted under the current item.

22. **Mr. Getahoun** (Ethiopia) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The United Nations currently faced many challenges in its complex task of disseminating information. Globalization spawned by the acceleration of information technology had had dramatic consequences for the Organization and had expanded the role of the Department of Public Information. However, the Department was faced with several constraints in fulfilling its mandate, which must be reduced in an effort to achieve maximum efficiency in the dissemination of information to a global audience.

23. With regard to the process of integration of United Nations information centres with the field offices of UNDP, his delegation hoped that the setbacks identified in the Secretary-General's report would not continuously jeopardize the flow of information. It felt strongly that practical measures should be taken to balance the desire for cost-effectiveness with the need to maintain the efficiency of the integration exercise. The United Nations information centres were key components of its outreach to the world community at large and played a crucial role in disseminating information to remote corners of the globe, thereby forming public opinion and creating awareness on such issues as social development, poverty eradication, education, environment, peace and security. The Department should assist developing countries in improving their information capacity and enhancing public awareness of United Nations activities. His delegation supported the initiative undertaken by the Department of Public Information to provide training

courses for journalists and broadcasters from developing countries, but efforts should be made to increase the number of trainees.

24. While his delegation welcomed the increased use of advanced technology by the United Nations, for example the Internet and web sites, it also pointed out that attention should be accorded to traditional means of communication, which were still the main source of information in most of the developing countries. United Nations Radio fulfilled an essential function in disseminating information on the activities and objectives of the Organization. Ethiopia was aware of the multi-dimensional rewards to be reaped from an enhanced communications infrastructure. In its efforts to combat marginalization in the global economy, the Government had embarked on measures to strengthen its information infrastructure, but despite the progress made, much remained to be done. Lack of adequate financial resources constituted a major obstacle. The Government would welcome a contribution from the United Nations and its specialized agencies in the form of a programme to provide training assistance and development programmes to improve and strengthen its information capacity. His delegation called on the developed countries to assist developing countries by transferring information technology and through capacity-building.

25. His delegation attached great importance to the role of the United Nations in public information. However, it was vital that the impartiality of information should be maintained, as well as equity in dissemination of information. To that end, the infrastructure of the Department of Public Information must be strengthened.

26. Ms. **Dukuly-Tolbert** (Liberia) said that her delegation aligned itself with the statement made by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. The twentieth century had witnessed rapid advances in the information and communications media. Managers, whether in the private or public sector, needed adequate, accurate information to help them formulate policies affecting millions of people, and an informed public of a free society could respond intelligently to the operation of their government. The maintenance of that healthy relationship between the governors and the governed called for modern know-how and communications facilities.

27. In the electronic age, characterized by globalization, the United Nations should be in the forefront of efforts to bridge the gap between developing and developed countries in the area of information and communications. It was therefore encouraging to note that the Department of Public Information collaborated with national Governments in conducting seminars and training local journalists . Her delegation also commended the detailed report of the Secretary-General (A/54/415).

28. At its twenty-first session, the Committee on Information had called upon Member States to increase assistance for the development of communications infrastructure in developing countries and urged all countries to ensure for journalists the free and effective performance of their task without interference.

29. Against that background, her delegation requested the Secretary-General to re-establish the United Nations Information Centre in Monrovia and to accelerate the training programmes for journalists from developing countries. The Centre would play a key role in gathering and disseminating news for vital sectors of Liberian society, assist the Government in efforts to promote national reconciliation, economic reconstruction and reintegration of refugees and to sustain peace and democracy. It would also serve as an avenue for Liberian youths to learn more about the positive role the United Nations continued to play in bringing peace and stability to Liberia.

30. Her delegation welcomed the report of the Committee on Information and thanked the Committee for its decision to admit Liberia as a member. It supported the draft resolution and hoped that it would be adopted without a vote. It also supported the initiative of the Secretary-General to develop the United Nations international radio broadcast facility.

31. **Mr. Deirki** (Syrian Arab Republic) stressed the importance of a new world information and communications order that was more just and effective and reflected the interests and aspirations of peoples, with a balanced flow of information from a diversity of sources. His delegation was concerned at the persistent inequality between the developed and the developing countries in communications technology. His Government was attempting to cover the issues of interest to the country and its citizens through audio-visual and print media and to demonstrate the need to achieve economic and social development, because

information and a higher standard of living complemented each other.

32. The United Nations in general, and the Department of Public Information in particular, must use information to promote their aims and activities in favour of peace, disarmament, economic and social development and environmental protection. The Organization must also endeavour to ensure the transfer of appropriate technology to developing countries and defend the rights of peoples subjected to foreign occupation.

33. Information should reflect the interests of the majority of Member States in matters dealt with in the Organization. It was imperative that the United Nations should not transmit subjective views or particular political positions, which would undermine its credibility and authority and disappoint the hopes many had placed in it.

34. The work of the Department of Public Information had, in general, borne fruit, but some problems remained, in particular the lack of parity between the six official languages, both in print and in electronic media. Many delegations believed that option C proposed in the report of the Secretary-General (A/AC.198/1999/9) on equal treatment for the six languages on the United Nations web site did not meet the needs of users in developing countries. His delegation urged the Department of Public Information to redistribute the funds already allocated in the budget in order to achieve linguistic parity as stipulated in General Assembly resolution 53/208, and avoid accentuating the predominance of one language version over others, Arabic in particular.

35. In the view of his delegation, an international United Nations radio station should be created. It requested the Department to promote the project and give it the priority it deserved, as radio was among the most accessible and cost-effective means of communication.

36. **Mr. Djeumo** (Cameroon) said that, considering that the information centres had proven to be irreplaceable tools for the dissemination of the ideas, principles and work of the United Nations, his delegation noted with deep concern that the activities and programmes carried out by those centres had been reduced as a result of their integration into UNDP field offices. That concern was reflected in the draft resolution on United Nations public information activities and policies adopted by the Committee on Information at its twenty-first session.

37. Cameroon requested the appointment of a director for the United Nations Information Centre in Yaoundé, whose activities had fallen off during the time it had been without a director. That appointment would allow the centre to resume the dissemination of information in its area of activity (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Gabon), and it would thus meet the needs of the people of the subregion.

38. **Mr. Speransky** (Russian Federation) said that developments in the field of information confirmed the important role it played in the life of the international community as a whole and of each country in particular. The United Nations, while intensifying its work in the field of information, should give priority to issues of international security, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 53/70 on developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security.

39. International principles must be elaborated to strengthen international information security, first in the form of a multilateral declaration, and later as a multilateral international treaty, with the main objective of creating the conditions for a safe international information exchange on the basis of equality, in order to prevent the use of information technologies for terrorist or criminal purposes, including destabilization of society. A way must also be found to prevent unauthorized transborder information influence and information wars.

40. His delegation shared the strategic objectives, functional priorities and recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information, and welcomed the efforts of the Department of Public Information to improve the Organization's capabilities with regard to the use of modern multimedia technologies. It supported the creation of a United Nations web site and its translation into all the official languages, including Russian.

41. His delegation approved measures to improve United Nations communications activities at the national and regional levels and noted with satisfaction that the recently established communications groups were already beginning to make an effective contribution to the formation of a realistic image of the Organization. The reorientation of Department activities towards application of the latest technologies

led to higher quality programmes and broader audiences all over the world. His delegation supported the efforts by the Organization to open and improve new specialized web sites, and emphasized that it was important to provide up-to-date information and reference material on peacekeeping operations and missions. It approved the creation of the electronic mail service for transmission of news from the United Nations to journalists in many countries of the world and supported the growing trend to hold meetings in Member States in close collaboration with local mass media.

42. At the same time, it was necessary to continue to use traditional means of communication, because they were the most easily accessible. His delegation was interested in the implementation of the direct international broadcasting project, in particular, in the Russian language. It called upon the Secretary-General and the Department to continue to focus on the issue of establishing an international broadcasting service and to inform the Committee on Information of the results of the Department's study in order to determine the interest of Member States and radio stations in the project. He drew the attention of the Secretariat to the fact that, despite assurances to the contrary, the Department had so far not enhanced the Russian component of the United Nations radio service.

43. The system of United Nations information centres must be strengthened and new technologies must continue to be introduced into daily use. As the Moscow Information Centre was playing an increasingly important role in the dissemination of information about United Nations activities in Russian, it would be appropriate to consider strengthening its staff.

44. **Mr. Semenenko** (Ukraine) said that his delegation supported the measures taken by the Department to reorient its policies and activities and applauded its efforts to disseminate information. While technological advances were important, however, it was important to maintain outreach through the traditional media. His delegation had always supported the proposal to develop the United Nations radio broadcasting capacity and believed that the success of that project would depend on the effective involvement of interested Member States and the provision of necessary resources. Ukraine would make available air time on its national broadcasting system for daily broadcasts from United Nations radio.

45. With respect to the advancement of radio and other traditional media, the international community must not lose sight of the need to update United Nations television and Internet technologies. His delegation supported the efforts to enrich the content of the United Nations web site but reiterated the need to build progressively a multilingual site to achieve parity between the six official languages.

46. Turning to the initiative to integrate United Nations information centres into UNDP field offices, he noted that the information component under the direction of UNDP in Ukraine was effective and presented a unified image of the United Nations along with enhanced information activities in major areas of the Organization's work, although experiences could vary from region to region.

47. The aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster continued to affect millions of people in Ukraine. The United Nations had a key role to play in communicating information about the disaster; the Department should enhance the publication and dissemination of related information and establish a special long-term programme.

48. Finally, the problem of attacks against journalists working in tense situations should remain on the agenda, and strategies for their protection should be prepared.

49. **Mr. Rani Ismail Hadi** (Malaysia) said that it was important for the United Nations to keep abreast of developments and take advantage of breakthroughs in technology in a world of virtually instantaneous communication.

50. His delegation welcomed the efforts being made by the Organization to use new information technologies for the benefit of Member States, whether by expanding its electronic database, preparing web sites or placing computer terminals at the disposal of delegations. Aware of the changes brought about by the information era, Malaysia had embarked on a national plan to promote modernization of companies, both domestic and international. That plan formed part of a programme called "Vision 2020", with the objective of transforming the country into a developed nation. Malaysia wished to establish a participatory society based on knowledge and information.

51. The information age also brought with it a number of challenges. The processing of news had

become complex. Information was not controlled by the authorities but had moved to other organizations and institutions. It was not a question of controlling the inflow of information but its content, in order to protect citizens, especially children and other vulnerable groups. From his Government's perspective, the use of information technology must lead to an improvement in the quality of life for individuals. Investment in technology must benefit not only the investors but the public as well; the people must become not only consumers but also producers of technology. Therefore, priority should be given not only to the quantity but also to the quality of investments.

52. An electronic government, one of Malaysia's objectives, was not merely governing through electronic means. Its real objective was to revamp structures, systems and procedures in pursuit of excellence.

53. His Government was aware that it did not yet possess the required technologies or knowledge to achieve its targets for modernization and therefore stressed the importance of closer cooperation with the rest of the world. In that regard, it encouraged "smart partnerships" between the Government and the private sector — collaboration instead of confrontation, enrichment instead of exploitation.

54. The market rewarded efficiency and punished inefficiency, but efficiency and equity did not go hand in hand. Therefore, leaving the digital economy to regulate itself would widen the gap between rich and poor countries. While the role of rules should be reduced, they should not be abolished completely, in order to prevent anarchy from reigning in the market place.

55. In conclusion, advances in technology must be based on a strong system of moral values. The danger of the Internet was the abandonment of moral values by some of its users. The United Nations had an important role to play in promoting those universal values.

56. **Mr. Farar** (United States of America) said that creating and disseminating accurate and meaningful information was a challenge in an interconnected world. His Government noted with satisfaction the results achieved by the Department in developing new communications strategies and the creation of the new structures necessary to achieve the objectives established. It also supported the recommendation of the Committee on Information that the Department should take more time to study ways to use the concept of modular parity in producing web sites. However, given the rapid pace of evolution in technology, the work of modernizing the web sites could not be delayed until the next session of the Committee, and current sites must be continued while options for increasing material available in all official languages were explored.

57. He regretted that budgetary resources had not been allocated to all departments for web site management and development. Given the tightly constrained resources with which the Department of Public Information must work, his delegation supported the proposal of Egypt to establish a working group of the Committee on Information to assist the Department in deciding where efficiencies could be obtained. That measure should help members of the Committee to understand the goals and constraints of the Department and take them into account in its recommendations. His delegation believed that the Department must accomplish its tasks within existing resources and find additional cost savings where it could. Ultimately, the web sites would improve overall efficiency, and costs for such sites could be defrayed by redistribution of resources within the Department.

58. The United Nations must reach many levels of audiences, resulting in the need to develop different media for different audiences. Consequently, in its forthcoming study of web sites, the Department must take into consideration that diversity and consider whether its current forms of communication were the most effective.

59. In conclusion, his delegation supported proposal C-3 in document A/AC.198/1999/9, but believed that the resources must be found within the Department's current budget, which represented over 5 per cent of the entire United Nations budget. His delegation would not support a request for additional funds.

60. **Mr. Pohan** (Indonesia) said that his delegation supported the statement by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

61. On the eve of the new millennium, the international community must endeavour to allow all humanity to participate on an equal basis in the new information era. A balanced and just flow of credible information must be established. His delegation

reaffirmed the need to promote the new world information and communications order.

62. His delegation supported the efforts of the Secretariat to continue the reorientation of its activities with a view to projecting the image of the Organization as an open, transparent and public institution capable of meeting the principal objectives enshrined in the Charter. The communications media were important in those efforts, but they did not automatically transmit information emanating from the United Nations to the world public because of various constraints.

63. His delegation was pleased that in draft resolution B the Secretary-General was requested to give a particular focus to educational institutions as key and indispensable partners in efforts to fully inform the peoples of the world of the aims and activities of the United Nations. Moreover, it was gratified that, in its efforts to provide the global media as speedily as possible with news material generated by the Organization, the Secretariat did not forget that the United Nations was not a news agency nor did it compete with the agencies.

64. Indonesia supported the work of the Secretary-General's spokesman, including the briefings to the media. It understood that the Secretariat objected to the presence of delegations at those briefings, but it would like to see that rule applied to all delegations equally and criteria for exceptions established.

65. The most important aspect of the public information activities of the United Nations was their credibility and reliability. Everyone expected the information coming from the United Nations system to be objective, and it was encouraging that those standards were being maintained. Nevertheless, some lapses must be pointed out in the hope that valuable lessons could be drawn from those experiences, namely two instances surrounding the popular consultation in East Timor.

66. The first instance showed how not to conduct an information campaign. On 14 September, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) had issued a release stating that large numbers of the population continued to be systematically assassinated and that current estimates put the number of deaths at 7,000. According to the Secretary-General's spokesman, FAO had not even been present on the ground at the time. That figure had been an exaggeration and had caused confusion in world public opinion. It appeared to Indonesia that the figure had been used to gain contributions and support, but at the expense of East Timor, Indonesia and the truth.

67. The second instance showed how not to select a spokesman for a United Nations mission. It had been evident from the beginning that the impartiality of the first spokesman for the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) was questionable. Its public statements had often been based on "unconfirmed reports" and had lacked credibility and reliability. It was important for the Department of Public Information to play a central role in selecting spokesmen for United Nations missions.

68. Indonesia reiterated that it would continue to support the public information activities of the United Nations and stressed the importance of continuous enhancement of their objectivity.

69. **Mr. Hogen** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information), in reply to the views of several delegations, said that data from the Department of Public Information indicated that approximately 10 per cent of visits to the United Nations web site came from developing countries, and that two years earlier, that figure had been only 4 per cent. However, the figures could not be exact because some servers did not use the two-letter code indicating the country of origin of the visit. The overall trend indicated that the most popular section of the web site was the documents area, including the General Assembly page, the news section, including press releases, peace and security and CyberSchoolBus.

70. As for the linguistic balance of the United Nations web site, the English and French sites were the most developed, primarily because they had been the first. The Arabic and Chinese sites had been launched only in 1998. Also, technology for creating pages in Arabic and Chinese was still not adequately developed.

71. As for the discontinuation of the Arabic version of the Department's annual compendium of General Assembly resolutions, the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services had informed him that, in view of technological developments, it was currently able to produce the official version of that document in all languages more quickly than the Department's version. Accordingly, to avoid duplication of effort, the Department had decided to cease production of the compendium.

72. In reply to the questions of several delegations about the status of preparations for the launch of the pilot project for the development of a United Nations international radio broadcasting capacity, he said that, in order to establish the availability of broadcasting facilities, the Caribbean region had been the first to be surveyed, with extremely positive results. Surveys were being conducted in other regions, and the results would be submitted to the Committee on Information at its twenty-second session.

73. With regard to cooperation between the Department and the Caribbean News Agency and the Caribbean Broadcasting Union, the Department worked closely with both organizations, which had recently merged, and would probably broadcast the daily programme of the pilot project.

74. Concerning the possibility of increasing the production of radio programmes aimed at French-speaking African countries, to that end the Department had redeployed an additional post at the P-2 level to the French language group of the Radio Service. As for the production of radio programmes in French/Creole, the Department had continued to study the issue with due regard to budgetary considerations and the need to ensure parity between all non-official languages.

75. Regarding the expansion of the Russian component of the Radio Service, that would depend on an increase in resources and broadcast time, which was being pursued as part of the implementation of the pilot project.

76. Turning to the suggestion to undertake a public information campaign leading up to the conference on small arms, he said that the Department was working closely with the Department of Disarmament Affairs on that issue, and was also producing a film entitled "Armed to the Teeth" which would be used to promote the first stage of the campaign.

77. The suggestion had been made that the Department should strengthen its cooperation with SIDSNet. It should be noted that the Department had done so in the preparations for the special session of the General Assembly on the sustainable development of small island developing States. It planned to continue that cooperation, as SIDSNet was an excellent channel to reach small island audiences.

78. Regarding the need to ensure regional coverage of activities relating to the special sessions of the General Assembly, he said that the Department was working closely with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to promote the special sessions of the General Assembly on women and on social development. The United Nations information centres were taking the lead in promoting those events as well as the Millennium Assembly and Summit.

79. In reply to those delegations which had underlined the importance of the training activities for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries and the requests for their strengthening, he said that the Department would continue to seek ways to expand the annual training programme to include more participants, and to invite journalists and broadcasters from those countries to participate in other programmes on such thematic issues as development and human rights.

80. During 1999, the Dag Hammarskjold Library had organized four regional workshops for librarians, which had been very well received, and it had decided to continue that programme in the coming biennium. It would also continue to expand its electronic resources and to acquire materials in traditional formats on topics of general interest, including peace and security, development, human rights and others.

81. The Department was aware of the concerns expressed over the integration of information centres. He was working closely with the Administrator of UNDP, and further steps in that process would be taken only after consultations with the host Governments, in accordance with the relevant General Assembly resolutions. A questionnaire had been sent to host Governments of integrated centres, and another to their directors, as part of a review of the status of those centres, for the purpose of establishing guidelines for the future.

82. In countries without an information centre, the practice of the Organization had been for the UNDP field office to assume responsibility for public information activities.

83. Concerning the wish expressed by Jamaica to see an information component established to provide services to the Northern Caribbean, the Department was making efforts to assign those duties to the UNESCO representative and if successful, would provide the necessary equipment and invite him to participate in relevant training.

84. Croatia had suggested that the United Nations Liaison Office in Zagreb could take on the information functions, and, since that office had more resources than the UNDP office, the Department would consider the possibility. As for the request of Liberia, the plans to reopen the Information Centre in Monrovia under the direction of the Resident Coordinator were moving ahead.

85. Despite staff reductions which the Department had been obliged to make, it had been able to reinstate the post of reference assistant in the Port-of-Spain Information Centre.

86. Several delegations had stressed the need for additional staff, especially directors of information centres, but staffing of field offices had been cut drastically during the previous and current bienniums, and only the General Assembly could determine the extent to which the Department could meet those requests.

Adoption of decisions

87. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to take a joint decision on the two draft resolutions and the draft decision recommended by the Committee on Information, namely, draft resolution A, contained in paragraph 49 of document A/54/21, and the revised texts of draft resolution B and the draft decision contained in paragraph 1 of the addendum to the report (A/54/21/Add.1).

88. *It was so decided.*

89. **The Chairman** invited delegations to make statements before the adoption of a joint decision on the two draft resolutions and the draft decision.

90. **Ms. Steele** (United States of America) said that her Government regretted that it could not join the consensus because of the programme budget implications of paragraph 35 of the revised text of draft resolution B, in particular, as contained in document A/54/21/Add.1.

91. **Mr. Sattar** (Secretary of the Committee) read out paragraph 35 of the revised text of draft resolution B and said that, in that paragraph, the Committee on Information was not requesting specific measures which would have financial consequences but was requesting the Secretary-General to continue his efforts and to submit proposals to the Committee on Information for consideration at its next session. Those efforts would be made by the Department of Public Information within the resources allocated in the programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001. Therefore, adoption of the draft resolution would have no programme budget implications. However, if at its next session the Committee on Information decided to accept a proposal on the United Nations web sites, a detailed statement of the programme budget implications would be submitted.

92. *Draft resolution A, the revised texts of draft resolution B and the draft decision were adopted.*

Completion of the Committee's work

93. **The Chairman** declared that the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) had completed its work for the fifty-fourth session.

The meeting rose at 5.35 p.m.